

[Home](#)[Browse and  
Comment](#)[Search](#)[Buy Books and  
CD-ROMs](#)[Help](#)

---

## Laws

By Plato

**Commentary:** Several comments have been posted about [Laws](#).

**Download:** A text-only version is [available for download](#).

---

## Laws

By Plato

Written 360 B.C.E

Translated by Benjamin Jowett



[Table of Contents](#)

## Book XII

If a herald or an ambassador carry a false message from our city to any other, or bring back a false message from the city to which he is sent, or be proved to have brought back, whether from friends or enemies, in his capacity of herald or ambassador, what they have never said, let him be indicted for having violated, contrary to the law, the commands and duties imposed upon him by Hermes and Zeus, and let there be a penalty fixed, which he shall suffer or pay if he be convicted.

Theft is a mean, and robbery a shameless thing; and none of the sons of Zeus delight in fraud and violence, or ever practised, either. Wherefore let no one be deluded by poets or mythologers into a mistaken belief of such such things, nor let him suppose, when he thieves or is guilty of violence, that he is doing nothing base, but only what the Gods themselves do. For such tales are untrue and improbable; and he who steals or robs contrary to the law, is never either a God or the son of a God; of this the legislator ought to be better informed than all the, poets put together. Happy is he and may he be forever happy, who is persuaded and listens to our words; but he who disobeys shall have to contend against the following law:-If a man steal anything belonging to the public, whether that which he steals be much or little, he shall have the same punishment. For he who steals a little steals with the same wish as he who steals much, but with less power, and he who takes up a greater amount; not having deposited it, is wholly unjust. Wherefore the law is not disposed to inflict a less penalty on the one than on the other because his theft, is less, but on the ground that the thief may possibly be in one case still curable, and may in another case be incurable. If any one convict in a court of law a stranger or a slave of a theft of public property, let the court determine what punishment he shall suffer, or what penalty he shall pay, bearing in

mind that he is probably not incurable. But the citizen who has been brought up as our citizens will have been, if he be found guilty of robbing his country by fraud or violence, whether he be caught in the act or not, shall be punished with death; for he is incurable.

Now for expeditions of war much consideration and many laws are required; the great principle of all is that no one of either sex should be without a commander; nor should the mind of any one be accustomed to do anything, either in jest or earnest, of his own motion, but in war and in peace he should look to and follow his leader, even in the least things being under his guidance; for example, he should stand or move, or exercise, or wash, or take his meals, or get up in the night to keep guard and deliver messages when he is bidden; and in the hour of danger he should not pursue and not retreat except by order of his superior; and in a word, not teach the soul or accustom her to know or understand how to do anything apart from others. Of all soldiers the life should be always and in all things as far as possible in common and together; there neither is nor ever will be a higher, or better, or more scientific principle than this for the attainment of salvation and victory in war. And we ought in time of peace from youth upwards to practise this habit of commanding others, and of being commanded by others; anarchy should have no place in the life of man or of the beasts who are subject to man. I may add that all dances ought to be performed with view to military excellence; and agility and ease should be cultivated for the same object, and also endurance of the want of meats and drinks, and of winter cold and summer heat, and of hard couches; and, above all, care should be taken not to destroy the peculiar qualities of the head and the feet by surrounding them with extraneous coverings, and so hindering their natural growth of hair and soles. For these are the extremities, and of all the parts of the body, whether they are preserved or not is of the greatest consequence; the one is the servant of the whole body, and the other the master, in whom all the ruling senses are by nature set. Let the young man imagine that he hears in what has preceded the praises of the military life; the law shall be as follows:-He shall serve in war who is on the roll or appointed to some special service, and if any one is absent from cowardice, and without the leave of the generals; he shall be indicted before the military commanders for failure of service when the army comes home; and the soldiers shall be his judges; the heavy armed, and the cavalry, and the other arms of the service shall form separate courts; and they shall bring the heavy-armed before the heavy-armed, and the horsemen before the horsemen, and the others in like manner before their peers; and he who is found guilty shall never be allowed to compete for any prize of valour, or indict another for not serving on an expedition, or be an accuser at all in any military matters. Moreover, the court shall further determine what punishment he shall suffer, or what penalty he shall pay. When the suits for failure of service are completed, the leaders of the several kinds of troops shall again hold an assembly, and they shall adjudge the prizes of valour; and he who likes shall give judgment in his own branch of the service, saying nothing about any former expedition, nor producing any proof or witnesses to confirm his statement, but speaking only of the present occasion. The crown of victory shall be an olive wreath which the victor shall offer up the temple of any war-god whom he likes, adding an inscription for a testimony to last during life, that such an one has received the first, the second, or prize. If any one goes on an expedition, and returns home before the appointed time, when the generals have not withdrawn the army, he shall be indicted for desertion before the same persons who took cognisance of failure of service, and if he be found guilty, the same punishment shall be inflicted on him.

Now every man who is engaged in any suit ought to be very careful of bringing false witness against any one, either intentionally or unintentionally, if he can help; for justice is truly said to be an honourable maiden, and falsehood is naturally repugnant to honour and justice. A witness ought to be very careful not to sift against justice, as for example in what relates to the throwing away of arms-he must distinguish the throwing them away when necessary, and not make that a reproach, or bring in action against some innocent person on that account. To make the

distinction maybe difficult; but still the law must attempt to define the different kinds in some way. Let me endeavour to explain my meaning by an ancient tale:-If Patroclus had been brought to the tent still alive but without his arms (and this has happened to innumerable persons), the original arms, which the poet says were presented to Peleus by the Gods as a nuptial gift when he married. Thetis, remaining in the hands of Hector, then the base spirits of that day might have reproached the son of Menoetius with having cast away his arms. Again, there is the case of those who have been thrown down precipices and lost their arms; and of those who at sea, and in stormy places, have been suddenly overwhelmed by floods of water; and there are numberless things of this kind which one might adduce by way of extenuation, and with the view of justifying a misfortune which is easily misrepresented. We must, therefore, endeavour to divide to the best of our power the greater and more serious evil from the lesser. And a distinction may be drawn in the use of terms of reproach. A man does not always deserve to be called the thrower away of his shield; he may be only the loser of his arms. For there is a great or rather absolute difference between him who is deprived of his arms by a sufficient force, and him who voluntarily lets his shield go. Let the law then be as follows:-If a person having arms is overtaken by the enemy and does not turn round and defend himself, but lets them go voluntarily or throws them away, choosing a base life and a swift escape rather than a courageous and noble and blessed death-in such a case of the throwing away of arms let justice be done, but the judge need take no note of the case just now mentioned; for the bad man ought always to be punished, in the hope that he may be improved, but not the unfortunate, for there is no advantage in that. And what shall be the punishment suited to him who has thrown away his weapons of defence? Tradition says that Caeneus, the Thessalian, was changed by a God from a woman into a man; but the converse miracle cannot now be wrought, or no punishment would be more proper than that the man who throws away his shield should be changed into a woman. This however is impossible, and therefore let us make a law as nearly like this as we can-that he who loves his life too well shall be in no danger for the remainder of his days, but shall live for ever under the stigma of cowardice. And let the law be in the following terms:-When a man is found guilty of disgracefully throwing away his arms in war, no general or military officer shall allow him to serve as a soldier, or give him any place at all in the ranks of soldiers; and the officer who gives the coward any place, shall suffer a penalty which the public examiner shall exact of him; and if he be of the highest class, he shall pay a thousand drachmae; or if he be of the second class, five minae; or if he be of the third, three minae; or if he be of the fourth class, one mina. And he who is found guilty of cowardice, shall not only be dismissed from manly dangers, which is a disgrace appropriate to his nature, but he shall pay a thousand drachmae, if he be of the highest class, and five minae if he be of the second class, and three if he be of the third class, and a mina, like the preceding, if he be of the fourth class.

What regulations will be proper about examiners, seeing that some of our magistrates are elected by lot, and for a year, and some for a longer time and from selected persons? Of such magistrates, who will be a sufficient censor or examiner, if any of them, weighed down by the pressure of office or his own inability to support the dignity of his office, be guilty of any crooked practice? It is by no means easy to find a magistrate who excels other magistrates in virtue, but still we must endeavour to discover some censor or examiner who is more than man. For the truth is, that there are many elements of dissolution in a state, as there are also in a ship, or in an animal; they all have their cords, and girders, and sinews-one nature diffused in many places, and called by many names; and the office of examiner is a most important element in the preservation and dissolution of states. For if the examiners are better than the magistrates, and their duty is fulfilled justly and without blame, then the whole state and country flourishes and is happy; but if the examination of the magistrates is carried on in a wrong way, then, by the relaxation of that justice which is the uniting principle of all constitutions, every power in the state is rent asunder from every other; they no longer incline in the same direction, but fill the

city with faction, and make many cities out of one, and soon bring all to destruction. Wherefore the examiners ought to be admirable in every sort of virtue. Let us invent a mode of creating them, which shall be as follows:-Every year, after the summer solstice, the whole city shall meet in the common precincts of Helios and Apollo, and shall present to the God three men out of their own number in the manner following:-Each citizen shall select, not himself, but some other citizen whom he deems in every way the best, and who is not less than fifty years of age. And out of the selected persons who have the greatest number of votes, they shall make a further selection until they reduce them to one-half, if they are an even number; but if they are not an even number, they shall subtract the one who has the smallest number of votes, and make them an even number, and then leave the half which have the great number of votes. And if two persons have an equal number of votes, and thus increase the number beyond one-half, they shall withdraw the younger of the two and do away with the excess; and then including all the rest they shall again vote, until there are left three having an unequal number of votes. But if all the three, or two out of the three, have equal votes, let them commit the election to good fate and fortune, and separate off by lot the first, and the second, and the third; these they shall crown with an olive wreath and give them the prize of excellence, at the same time proclaiming to all the world that the city of the Magnetes, by providence of the Gods, is again preserved, and presents to the Sun and to Apollo her three best men as first-fruits, to be a common offering to them, according to the ancient law, as long as their lives answer to the judgment formed of them. And these shall appoint in their first year twelve examiners, to continue until each has completed seventy-five years, to whom three shall afterwards be added yearly; and let these divide all the magistracies into twelve parts, and prove the holders of them by every sort of test to which a freeman may be subjected; and let them live while they hold office in the precinct of Helios and Apollo, in which they were chosen, and let each one form a judgment of some things individually, and of others in company with his colleagues; and let him place a writing in the agora about each magistracy, and what the magistrate ought to suffer or pay, according to the decision of the examiners. And if a magistrate does not admit that he has been justly judged, let him bring the examiners before the select judges, and if he be acquitted by their decision, let him, if he will, accuse the examiners themselves; if, however, he be convicted, and have been condemned to death by the examiners, let him die (and of course he can only die once):-but any other penalties which admit of being doubled let him suffer twice over.

And now let us pass under review the examiners themselves; what will their examination be, and how conducted? During the life of these men, whom the whole state counts worthy of the rewards of virtue, they shall have the first seat at all public assemblies, and at all Hellenic sacrifices and sacred missions, and other public and holy ceremonies in which they share. The chiefs of each sacred mission shall be selected from them, and they only of all the citizens shall be adorned with a crown of laurel; they shall all be priests of Apollo and Helios; and one of them, who is judged first of the priests created in that year, shall be high priest; and they shall write up his name in each year to be a measure of time as long as the city lasts; and after their death they shall be laid out and carried to the grave and entombed in a manner different from the other citizens. They shall be decked in a robe all of white, and there shall be no crying or lamentation over them; but a chorus of fifteen maidens, and another of boys, shall stand around the bier on either side, hymning the praises of the departed priests in alternate responses, declaring their blessedness in song all day long; and at dawn a hundred of the youths who practise gymnastic and whom the relations of the departed shall choose, shall carry the bier to the sepulchre, the young men marching first, dressed in the garb of warriors-the cavalry with their horses, the heavy-armed with their arms, and the others in like manner. And boys neat the bier and in front of it shall sing their national hymn, and maidens shall follow behind, and with them the women who have passed the age of childbearing; next, although they are interdicted from other burials, let priests and priestesses follow, unless the Pythian oracle forbid them; for this

burial is free from pollution. The place of burial shall be an oblong vaulted chamber underground, constructed of tufa, which will last for ever, having stone couches placed side by side. And here they will lay the blessed person, and cover the sepulchre with a circular mound of earth and plant a grove of trees around on every side but one; and on that side the sepulchre shall be allowed to extend for ever, and a new mound will not be required. Every year they shall have contests in music and gymnastics, and in horsemanship, in honour of the dead. These are the honours which shall be given to those who at the examination are found blameless; but if any of them, trusting to the scrutiny being over, should, after the judgment has been given, manifest the wickedness of human nature, let the law ordain that he who pleases shall indict him, and let the cause be tried in the following manner. In the first place, the court shall be composed of the guardians of the law, and to them the surviving examiners shall be added, as well as the court of select judges; and let the pursuer lay his indictment in this form-he shall say that so-and-so is unworthy of the prize of virtue and of his office; and if the defendant be convicted let him be deprived of his office, and of the burial, and of the other honours given him. But if the prosecutor do not obtain the fifth part of the votes, let him, if he be of the first class, pay twelve minae, and eight if he be of the second class, and six if he be of the third class, and two minae if he be of the fourth class.

The so-called decision of Rhadamanthus is worthy of all admiration. He knew that the men of his own time believed and had no doubt that there were Gods, which was a reasonable belief in those days, because most men were the sons of Gods, and according to tradition he was one himself. He appears to have thought that he ought to commit judgment to no man, but to the Gods only, and in this way suits were simply and speedily decided by him. For he made the two parties take an oath respecting the points in dispute, and so got rid of the matter speedily and safely. But now that a certain portion of mankind do not believe at all in the existence of the Gods, and others imagine that they have no care of us, and the opinion of most men, and of the men, is that in return for small sacrifice and a few flattering words they will be their accomplices in purloining large sums and save them from many terrible punishments, the way of Rhadamanthus is no longer suited to the needs of justice; for as the needs of men about the Gods are changed, the laws should also be changed;-in the granting of suits a rational legislation ought to do away with the oaths of the parties on either side-he who obtains leave to bring an action should write, down the charges, but should not add an oath; and the defendant in like manner should give his denial to the magistrates in writing, and not swear; for it is a dreadful thing to know, when many lawsuits are going on in a state that almost half the people who meet one another quite unconcernedly at the public meals and in other companies and relations of private life are perjured. Let the law, then, be as follows:-A judge who is about to give judgment shall take an oath, and he who is choosing magistrates for the state shall either vote on oath or with a voting tablet which he brings from a temple; so too the judge of dances and of all music, and the superintendents and umpires of gymnastic and equestrian contests, and any matters in which, as far as men can judge, there is nothing to be gained by a false oath; but all cases in which a denial confirmed by an oath clearly results in a great advantage to the taker of the oath, shall be decided without the oath of the parties to the suit, and the presiding judges shall not permit either of them. to use an oath for the sake of persuading, nor to call down curses on himself and his race, nor to use unseemly supplications or womanish laments. But they shall ever be teaching and learning what is just in auspicious words; and he who does otherwise shall be supposed to speak beside the point, and the judges shall again bring him back to the question at issue. On the other hand, strangers in their dealings with strangers shall as at present have power to give and receive oaths, for they will not often grow old in the city or leave a fry of young ones like themselves to be the sons and heirs of the land.

As to the initiation of private suits, let the manner of deciding causes between all citizens be the



same as in cases in which any freeman is disobedient to the state in minor matters, of which the penalty is not stripes, imprisonment, or death. But as regards attendance at choruses or processions or other shows, and as regards public services, whether the celebration of sacrifice in peace, or the payment of contributions in war-in all these cases, first comes the necessity of providing remedy for the loss; and by those who will not obey, there shall be security given to the officers whom the city and the law empower to exact the sum due; and if they forfeit their security, let the goods which they have pledged be, and the money given to the city; but if they ought to pay a larger sum, the several magistrates shall impose upon the disobedient a suitable penalty, and bring them before the court, until they are willing to do what they are ordered.

Now a state which makes money from the cultivation of the soil only, and has no foreign trade, must consider what it will do about the emigration of its own people to other countries, and the reception of strangers from elsewhere. About these matters the legislator has to consider, and he will begin by trying to persuade men as far as he can. The intercourse of cities with one another is apt to create a confusion of manners; strangers, are always suggesting novelties to strangers. When states are well governed by good laws the mixture causes the greatest possible injury; but seeing that most cities are the reverse of well-ordered, the confusion which arises in them from the reception of strangers, and from the citizens themselves rushing off into other cities, when any one either young or old desires to travel anywhere abroad at whatever time, is of no consequence. On the other hand, the refusal of states to receive others, and for their own citizens never to go to other places, is an utter impossibility, and to the rest of the world is likely to appear ruthless and uncivilized; it is a practise adopted by people who use harsh words, such as xenelasia or banishment of strangers, and who have harsh and morose ways, as men think. And to be thought or not to be thought well of by the rest of the world is no light matter; for the many are not so far wrong in their judgment of who are bad and who are good, as they are removed from the nature of virtue in themselves. Even bad men have a divine instinct which guesses rightly, and very many who are utterly depraved form correct notions and judgments of the differences between the good and bad. And the generality of cities are quite right in exhorting us to value a good reputation in the world, for there is no truth greater and more important than this-that he who is really good (I am speaking of the man who would be perfect) seeks for reputation with, but not without, the reality of goodness. And our Cretan colony ought also to acquire the fairest and noblest reputation for virtue from other men; and there is every reason to expect that, if the reality answers to the idea, she will before of the few well-ordered cities which the sun and the other Gods behold. Wherefore, in the matter of journeys to other countries and the reception of strangers, we enact as follows:-In the first place, let no one be allowed to go anywhere at all into a foreign country who is less than forty years of age; and no one shall go in a private capacity, but only in some public one, as a herald, or on an embassy; or on a sacred mission. Going abroad on an expedition or in war, not to be included among travels of the class authorized by the state. To Apollo at Delphi and to Zeus at Olympia and to Nemea and to the Isthmus,-citizens should be sent to take part in the sacrifices and games there dedicated to the Gods; and they should send as many as possible, and the best and fairest that can be found, and they will make the city renowned at holy meetings in time of peace, procuring a glory which shall be the converse of that which is gained in war; and when they come home they shall teach the young that the institutions of other states are inferior to their own. And they shall send spectators of another sort, if they have the consent of the guardians, being such citizens as desire to look a little more at leisure at the doings of other men; and these no law shall hinder. For a city which has no experience of good and bad men or intercourse with them, can never be thoroughly, and perfectly civilized, nor, again, can the citizens of a city properly observe the laws by habit only, and without an intelligent understanding of them. And there always are in the world a few inspired men whose acquaintance is beyond price, and who spring up quite as much in ill-ordered as in well-ordered cities. These are they whom the citizens of a well ordered city should

be ever seeking out, going forth over sea and over land to find him who is incorruptible-that he may establish more firmly institutions in his own state which are good already; and amend what is deficient; for without this examination and enquiry a city will never continue perfect any more than if the examination is ill-conducted.

**Cleinias.** How can we have an examination and also a good one?

Athenian Stranger. In this way: In the first place, our spectator shall be of not less than fifty years of age; he must be a man of reputation, especially in war, if he is to exhibit to other cities a model of the guardians of the law, but when he is more than sixty years of age he shall no longer continue in his office of spectator, And when he has carried on his inspection during as many out of the ten years of his office as he pleases, on his return home let him go to the assembly of those who review the laws. This shall be a mixed body of young and old men, who shall be required to meet daily between the hour of dawn and the rising of the sun. They shall consist, in the first place, of the priests who have obtained the rewards of virtue; and in the second place, of guardians of the law, the ten eldest being chosen; the general superintendent of education shall also be member, as well the last appointed as those who have been released from the office; and each of them shall take with him as his companion young man, whomsoever he chooses, between the ages of thirty and forty. These shall be always holding conversation and discourse about the laws of their own city or about any specially good ones which they may hear to be existing elsewhere; also about kinds of knowledge which may appear to be of use and will throw light upon the examination, or of which the want will make the subject of laws dark and uncertain to them. Any knowledge of this sort which the elders approve, the younger men shall learn with all diligence; and if any one of those who have been invited appear to be unworthy, the whole assembly shall blame him who invited him. The rest of the city shall watch over those among the young men who distinguish themselves, having an eye upon them, and especially honouring them if they succeed, but dishonouring them above the rest if they turn out to be inferior. This is the assembly to which he who has visited the institutions of other men, on his return home shall straightway go, and if he have discovered any one who has anything to say about the enactment of laws or education or nurture, or if he have himself made any observations, let him communicate his discoveries to the whole assembly. And if he be seen to have come home neither better nor worse, let him be praised at any rate for his enthusiasm; and if he be much better, let him be praised so much the more; and not only while he lives but after his death let the assembly honour him with fitting honours. But if on his return home he appear to have been corrupted, pretending to be wise when he is not, let him hold no communication with any one, whether young or old; and if he will hearken to the rulers, then he shall be permitted to live as a private individual; but if he will not, let him die, if he be convicted in a court of law of interfering about education and the laws, And if he deserve to be indicted, and none of the magistrates indict him, let that be counted as a disgrace to them when the rewards of virtue are decided.

Let such be the character of the person who goes abroad, and let him go abroad under these conditions. In the next place, the stranger who comes from abroad should be received in a friendly spirit. Now there are four kinds of strangers, of whom we must make some mention-the first is he who comes and stays throughout the summer; this class are like birds of passage, taking wing in pursuit of commerce, and flying over the sea to other cities, while the season lasts; he shall be received in market-places and harbours and public buildings, near the city but outside, by those magistrates who are appointed to superintend these matters; and they shall take care that a stranger, whoever he be, duly receives justice; but he shall not be allowed to make any innovation. They shall hold the intercourse with him which is necessary, and this shall be as little as possible. The second kind is just a spectator who comes to see with his eyes and hear with his ears the festivals of the Muses; such ought to have entertainment provided them at the temples by

hospitable persons, and the priests and ministers of the temples should see and attend to them. But they should not remain more than a reasonable time; let them see and hear that for the sake of which they came, and then go away, neither having suffered nor done any harm. The priests shall be their judges, if any of them receive or do any wrong up to the sum of fifty drachmae, but if any greater charge be brought, in such cases the suit shall come before the wardens of the agora. The third kind of stranger is he who comes on some public business from another land, and is to be received with public honours. He is to be received only by the generals and commanders of horse and foot, and the host by whom he is entertained, in conjunction with the Prytanes, shall have the sole charge of what concerns him. There is a fourth class of persons answering to our spectators, who come from another land to look at ours. In the first place, such visits will be rare, and the visitor should be at least fifty years of age; he may possibly be wanting to see something that is rich and rare in other states, or himself to show something in like manner to another city. Let such an one, then, go unbidden to the doors of the wise and rich, being one of them himself: let him go, for example, to the house of the superintendent of education, confident that he is a fitting guest of such a host, or let him go to the house of some of those who have gained the prize of virtue and hold discourse with them, both learning from them, and also teaching them; and when he has seen and heard all, he shall depart, as a friend taking leave of friends, and be honoured by them with gifts and suitable tributes of respect. These are the customs, according to which our city should receive all strangers of either sex who come from other countries, and should send forth her own citizens, showing respect to Zeus, the God of hospitality, not forbidding strangers at meals and sacrifices, as is the manner which prevails among the children of the Nile, nor driving them away by savage proclamations.

When a man becomes surety, let him give the security in a distinct form, acknowledging the whole transaction in a written document, and in the presence of not less than three witnesses if the sum be under a thousand drachmae, and of not less than five witnesses if the sum be above a thousand drachmae. The agent of a dishonest or untrustworthy seller shall himself be responsible; both the agent and the principal shall be equally liable. If a person wishes to find anything in the house of another, he shall enter naked, or wearing only a short tunic and without a girdle, having first taken an oath by the customary Gods that he expects to find it there; he shall then make his search, and the other shall throw open his house and allow him to search things both sealed and unsealed. And if a person will not allow the searcher to make his search, he who is prevented shall go to law with him, estimating the value of the goods after which he is searching, and if the other be convicted he shall pay twice the value of the article. If the master be absent from home, the dwellers in the house shall let him search the unsealed property, and on the sealed property the searcher shall set another seal, and shall appoint any one whom he likes to guard them during five days; and if the master of the house be absent during a longer time, he shall take with him the wardens of the city, and so make his search, opening the sealed property as well as the unsealed, and then, together with the members of the family and the wardens of the city, he shall seal them up again as they were before. There shall be a limit of time in the case of disputed things, and he who has had possession of them during a certain time shall no longer be liable to be disturbed. As to houses and lands there can be no dispute in this state of ours; but if a man has any other possessions which he has used and openly shown in the city and in the agora and in the temples, and no one has put in a claim to them, and some one says that he was looking for them during this time, and the possessor is proved to have made no concealment, if they have continued for a year, the one having the goods and the other looking for them, the claim of the seeker shall not be allowed after the expiration of the year; or if he does not use or show the lost property in the market or in the city, but only in the country, and no one offers himself as the owner during five years, at the expiration of the five years the claim shall be barred for ever after; or if he uses them in the city but within the house, then the appointed time of claiming the goods shall be three years, or ten years if he has them in the country in private. And if he has



them in another land, there shall be no limit of time or prescription, but whenever the owner finds them he may claim them.

If any one prevents another by force from being present at a trial, whether a principal party or his witnesses; if the person prevented be a slave, whether his own or belonging to another, the suit shall be incomplete and invalid; but if he who is prevented be a freeman, besides the suit being incomplete, the other who has prevented him shall be imprisoned for a year, and shall be prosecuted for kidnapping by any one who pleases. And if any one hinders by force a rival competitor in gymnastic or music, or any other sort of contest, from being present at the contest, let him who has a mind inform the presiding judges, and they shall liberate him who is desirous of competing; and if they are not able, and he who hinders the other from competing wins the prize, then they shall give the prize of victory to him who is prevented, and inscribe him as the conqueror in any temples which he pleases; and he who hinders the other shall not be permitted to make any offering or inscription having reference to that contest, and in any case he shall be liable for damages, whether he be defeated or whether he conquer.

If any one knowingly receives anything which has been stolen, he shall undergo the same punishment as the thief, and if a man receives an exile he shall be punished with death. Every man should regard the friend and enemy of the state as his own friend and enemy; and if any one makes peace or war with another on his own account, and without the authority of the state, he, like the receiver of the exile, shall undergo the penalty of death. And if any fraction of the City declare war or peace against any, the generals shall indict the authors of this proceeding, and if they are convicted death shall be the penalty. Those who serve their country ought to serve without receiving gifts, and there ought to be no excusing or approving the saying, "Men should receive gifts as the reward of good, but not of evil deeds"; for to know which we are doing, and to stand fast by our knowledge, is no easy matter. The safest course is to obey the law which says, "Do no service for a bribe," and let him who disobeys, if he be convicted, simply die. With a view to taxation, for various reasons, every man ought to have had his property valued: and the tribesmen should likewise bring a register of the yearly produce to the wardens of the country, that in this way there may be two valuations; and the public officers may use annuity whichever on consideration they deem the best, whether they prefer to take a certain portion of the whole value, or of the annual revenue, after subtracting what is paid to the common tables.

Touching offerings to the Gods, a moderate man should observe moderation in what he offers. Now the land and the hearth of the house of all men is sacred to all Gods; wherefore let no man dedicate them a second time to the Gods. Gold and silver, whether possessed by private persons or in temples, are in other cities provocative of envy, and ivory, the product of a dead body, is not a proper offering; brass and iron, again, are instruments of war; but of wood let a man bring what offerings he likes, provided it be a single block, and in like manner of stone, to the public temples; of woven work let him not offer more than one woman can execute in a month. White is a colour suitable to the Gods, especially in woven works, but dyes should only be used for the adornments of war. The most divine of gifts are birds and images, and they should be such as one painter can execute in a single day. And let all other offerings follow a similar rule.

Now that the whole city has been divided into parts of which the nature and number have been described, and laws have been given about all the most important contracts as far as this was possible, the next thing will be to have justice done. The first of the courts shall consist of elected judges, who shall be chosen by the plaintiff and the defendant in common: these shall be called arbiters rather than judges. And in the second court there shall be judges of the villages and tribes corresponding to the twelvefold division of the land, and before these the litigants shall go to contend for greater damages, if the suit be not decided before the first judges; the defendant, if he

be defeated the second time, shall pay a fifth more than the damages mentioned in the indictment; and if he find fault with his judges and would try a third time, let him carry the suit before the select judges, and if he be again defeated, let him pay the whole of the damages and half as much again. And the plaintiff, if when defeated before the first judges he persist in going on to the second, shall if he wins receive in addition to the damages a fifth part more, and if defeated he shall pay a like sum; but if he is not satisfied with the previous decision, and will insist on proceeding to a third court, then if he win he shall receive from the defendant the amount of the damages and, as I said before, half as much again, and the plaintiff, if he lose, shall pay half of the damages claimed. Now the assignment by lot of judges to courts and the completion of the number of them, and the appointment of servants to the different magistrates, and the times at which the several causes should be heard, and the votings and delays, and all the things that necessarily concern suits, and the order of causes, and the time in which answers have to be put in and parties are to appear-of these and other things akin to these we have indeed already spoken, but there is no harm in repeating what is right twice or thrice:-All lesser and easier matters which the elder legislator has omitted may be supplied by the younger one. Private courts will be sufficiently regulated in this way, and the public and state courts, and those which the magistrates must use in the administration of their several offices, exist in many other states. Many very respectable institutions of this sort have been framed by good men, and from them the guardians of the law may by reflection derive what is necessary, for the order of our new state, considering and correcting them, and bringing them to the test of experience, until every detail appears to be satisfactorily determined; and then putting the final seal upon them, and making them irreversible, they shall use them for ever afterwards. As to what relates to the silence of judges and the abstinence from words of evil omen and the reverse, and the different notions of the just and good and honourable which exist in our: own as compared with other states, they have been partly mentioned already, and another part of them will be mentioned hereafter as we draw near the end. To all these matters he who would be an equal judge, shall justly look, and he shall possess writings about them that he may learn them. For of all kinds of knowledge the knowledge of good laws has the greatest power of improving the learner; otherwise there would be no meaning the divine and admirable law possessing a name akin to mind (nous, nomos). And of all other words, such as the praises and censures of individuals which occur in poetry and also in prose, whether written down or uttered in daily conversation, whether men dispute about them in the spirit of contention or weakly assent to them, as is often the case-of all these the one sure test is the writings of the legislator, which the righteous judge ought to have in his mind as the antidote of all other words, and thus make himself and the city stand upright, procuring for the good the continuance and increase of justice, and for the bad, on the other hand, a conversion from ignorance and intemperance, and in general from all unrighteousness, as far as their evil minds can be healed, but to those whose web of life is in reality finished, giving death, which is the only remedy for souls in their condition, as I may say truly again and again. And such judges and chiefs of judges will be worthy of receiving praise from the whole city.

When the suits of the year are completed the following laws shall regulate their execution:-In the first place, the judge shall assign to the party who wins the suit the whole property of him who loses, with the exception of mere necessities, and the assignment shall be made through the herald immediately after each decision in the hearing of the judges; and when the month arrives following the month in which the courts are sitting (unless the gainer of the suit has been previously satisfied), the court shall follow up the case, and hand over to the winner the goods of the loser; but if they find that he has not the means of paying, and the sum deficient is not less than a drachma, the insolvent person shall not have any right of going to law with any other man until he have satisfied the debt of the winning party; but other persons shall still have the right of bringing suits against him. And if any one after he is condemned refuses to acknowledge the

authority which condemned him, let the magistrates who are thus deprived of their authority bring him before the court of the guardians of the law, and if he be cast, let him be punished with death, as a subverter of the whole state and of the laws.

Thus a man is born and brought up, and after this manner he begets and brings up his own children, and has his share of dealings with other men, and suffers if he has done wrong to any one, and receives satisfaction if he has been wronged, and so at length in due time he grows old under the protection of the laws, and his end comes in the order of nature. Concerning the dead of either sex, the religious ceremonies which may fittingly be performed, whether appertaining to the Gods of the underworld or of this, shall be decided by the interpreters with absolute authority. Their sepulchres are not to be in places which are fit for cultivation, and there shall be no monuments in such spots, either large or small, but they shall occupy that part of the country which is naturally adapted for receiving and concealing the bodies of the dead with as little hurt as possible to the living. No man, living or dead, shall deprive the living of the sustenance which the earth, their foster-parent, is naturally inclined to provide for them. And let not the mound be piled higher than would be the work of five men completed in five days; nor shall the stone which is placed over the spot be larger than would be sufficient to receive the praises of the dead included in four heroic lines. Nor shall the laying out of the dead in the house continue for a longer time than is sufficient to distinguish between him who is in a trance only and him who is really dead, and speaking generally, the third day after death will be a fair time for carrying out the body to the sepulchre. Now we must believe the legislator when he tells us that the soul is in all respects superior to the body, and that even in life what makes each one of us to be what we are is only the soul; and that the body follows us about in the likeness of each of us, and therefore, when we are dead, the bodies of the dead are quite rightly said to be our shades or images; for the true and immortal being of each one of us which is called the soul goes on her way to other Gods, before them to give an account-which is an inspiring hope to the good, but very terrible to the bad, as the laws of our fathers tell us; and they also say that not much can be done in the way of helping a man after he is dead. But the living-he should be helped by all his kindred, that while in life he may be the holiest and justest of men, and after death may have no great sins to be punished in the world below. If this be true, a man ought not to waste his substance under the idea that all this lifeless mass of flesh which is in process of burial is connected with him; he should consider that the son, or brother, or the beloved one, whoever he may be, whom he thinks he is laying in the earth, has gone away to complete and fulfil his own destiny, and that his duty is rightly to order the present, and to spend moderately on the lifeless altar of the Gods below. But the legislator does not intend moderation to be taken, in the sense of meanness. Let the law, then, be as follows:-The expenditure on the entire funeral of him who is of the highest class shall not exceed five minae; and for him who is of the second class, three minae, and for him who is of the third class, two minae, and for him, who is of the fourth class, one mina, will be a fair limit of expense. The guardians of the law ought to take especial care of the different ages of life, whether childhood, or manhood, or any other age. And at the end of all, let there be some one guardian of the law presiding, who shall be chosen by the friends of the deceased to superintend, and let it be glory to him to manage with fairness and moderation what relates to the dead, and a discredit to him if they are not well managed. Let the laying out and other ceremonies be in accordance with custom, but to the statesman who adopts custom as his law we must give way in certain particulars. It would be monstrous for example that he should command any man to weep or abstain from weeping over the dead; but he may forbid cries of lamentation, and not allow the voice of the mourner to be heard outside the house; also, he may forbid the bringing of the dead body into the open streets, or the processions of mourners in the streets, and may require that before daybreak they should be outside the city. Let these, then, be our laws relating to such matters, and let him who obeys be free from penalty; but he who disobeys even a single guardian of the law shall be punished by them all with a fitting penalty. Other modes of burial, or again

the denial of burial, which is to be refused in the case of robbers of temples and parricides and the like, have been devised and are embodied in the preceding laws, so that now our work of legislation is pretty nearly at an end; but in all cases the end does not consist in doing something or acquiring something or establishing something-the end will be attained and finally accomplished, when we have provided for the perfect and lasting continuance of our institutions until then our creation is incomplete.

**Cle.** That is very good Stranger; but I wish you would tell me more clearly what you mean.

**Ath.** O Cleinias, many things of old time were well said and sung; and the saying about the Fates was one of them.

**Cle.** What is it?

**Ath.** The saying that Lachesis or the giver of the lots is the first of them, and that Clotho or the spinster is the second of them, and that Atropos or the unchanging one is the third of them; and that she is the preserver of the things which we have spoken, and which have been compared in a figure to things woven by fire, they both (i.e., Atropos and the fire) producing the quality of unchangeableness. I am speaking of the things which in a state and government give not only health and salvation to the body, but law, or rather preservation of the law, in the soul; and, if I am not mistaken, this seems to be still wanting in our laws: we have still to see how we can implant in them this irreversible nature.

**Cle.** It will be no small matter if we can only discover how such a nature can be implanted in anything.

**Ath.** But it certainly can be; so much I clearly see.

**Cle.** Then let us not think of desisting until we have imparted this quality to our laws; for it is ridiculous, after a great deal of labour has been spent, to place a thing at last on an insecure foundation.

**Megillus.** I approve of your suggestion, and am quite of the same mind with you.

**Cle.** Very good: And now what, according to you, is to be the salvation of our government and of our laws, and how is it to be effected?

**Ath.** Were we not saying that there must be in our city a council which was to be of this sort:- The ten oldest guardians of the law, and all those who have obtained prizes of virtue, were to meet in the same assembly, and the council was also to include those who had visited foreign countries in the hope of hearing something that might be of use in the preservation of the laws, and who, having come safely home, and having been tested in these same matters, had proved themselves to be worthy to take part in the assembly;-each of the members was to select some young man of not less than thirty years of age, he himself judging in the first instance whether the young man was worthy by nature and education, and then suggesting him to the others, and if he seemed to them also to be worthy they were to adopt him; but if not, the decision at which they arrived was to be kept a secret from the citizens at large; and, more especially, from the rejected candidate. The meeting of the council was to be held early in the morning, when everybody was most at leisure from all other business, whether public or private-was not something of this sort said by us before?

**Cle.** True.

**Ath.** Then, returning to the council, I would say further, that if we let it down to be the anchor of



the state, our city, having everything which is suitable to her, will preserve all that we wish to preserve.

**Cle.** What do you mean?

**Ath.** Now is the time for me to speak the truth in all earnestness.

**Cle.** Well said, and I hope that you will fulfil your intention.

**Ath.** Know, Cleinias, that everything, in all that it does, has a natural saviour, as of an animal the soul and the head are the chief saviours.

**Cle.** Once more, what do you mean?

**Ath.** The well-being of those two is obviously the preservation of every living thing.

**Cle.** How is that?

**Ath.** The soul, besides other things, contains mind, and the head, besides other things, contains sight and hearing; and the mind, mingling with the noblest of the senses, and becoming one with them, may be truly called the salvation of all.

**Cle.** Yes, Quite so.

**Ath.** Yes, indeed; but with what is that intellect concerned which, mingling with the senses, is the salvation of ships in storms as well as in fair weather? In a ship, when the pilot and the sailors unite their perceptions with the piloting mind, do they not save both themselves and their craft?

**Cle.** Very true.

**Ath.** We do not want many illustrations about such matters:-What aim would the general of an army, or what aim would a physician propose to himself, if he were seeking to attain salvation?

**Cle.** Very good.

**Ath.** Does not the general aim at victory and superiority in war, and do not the physician and his assistants aim at producing health in the body?

**Cle.** Certainly.

**Ath.** And a physician who is ignorant about the body, that is to say, who knows not that which we just now called health, or a general who knows not victory, or any others who are ignorant of the particulars of the arts which we mentioned, cannot be said to have understanding about any of these matters.

**Cle.** They cannot.

**Ath.** And what would you say of the state? If a person proves to be ignorant of the aim to which the statesman should look, ought he, in the first place, to be called a ruler at all; further, will he ever be able to preserve that of which he does not even know the aim?

**Cle.** Impossible.

**Ath.** And therefore, if our settlement of the country is to be perfect, we ought to have some institution, which, as I was saying, will tell what is the aim of the state, and will inform us how we are to attain this, and what law or what man will advise us to that end. Any state which has no such institution is likely to be devoid of mind and sense, and in all her actions will proceed by mere chance.

**Cle.** Very true.

**Ath.** In which, then, of the parts or institutions of the state is any such guardian power to be

found? Can we say?

**Cle.** I am not quite certain, Stranger; but I have a suspicion that you are referring to the assembly which you just now said was to meet at night.

**Ath.** You understand me perfectly, Cleinias; and we must assume, as the argument implies, that this council possesses all virtue; and the beginning of virtue is not to make mistakes by guessing many things, but to look steadily at one thing, and on this to fix all our aims.

**Cle.** Quite true.

**Ath.** Then now we shall see why there is nothing wonderful in states going astray-the reason is that their legislators have such different aims; nor is there anything wonderful in some laying down as their rule of justice, that certain individuals should bear rule in the state, whether they be good or bad, and others that the citizens should be rich, not caring whether they are the slaves of other men or not. The tendency of others, again, is towards freedom; and some legislate with a view to two things at once-they want to be at the same time free and the lords of other states; but the wisest men, as they deem themselves to be, look to all these and similar aims, and there is no one of them which they exclusively honour, and to which they would have all things look.

**Cle.** Then, Stranger, our former assertion will hold, for we were saying that laws generally should look to one thing only; and this, as we admitted, was rightly said to be virtue.

**Ath.** Yes.

**Cle.** And we said that virtue was of four kinds?

**Ath.** Quite true.

**Cle.** And that mind was the leader of the four, and that to her the three other virtues and all other things ought to have regard?

**Ath.** You follow me capitally, Cleinias, and I would ask you to follow me to the end, for we have already said that the mind of the pilot, the mind of the physician and of the general look to that one thing to which they ought to look; and now we may turn to mind political, of which, as of a human creature, we will ask a question:-O wonderful being, and to what are you looking? The physician is able to tell his single aim in life, but you, the superior, as you declare yourself to be, of all intelligent beings, when you are asked are not able to tell. Can you, Megillus, and you, Cleinias, say distinctly what is the aim of mind political, in return for the many explanations of things which I have given you?

**Cle.** We cannot, Stranger.

**Ath.** Well, but ought we not to desire to see it, and to see where it is to be found?

**Cle.** For example, where?

**Ath.** For example, we were saying that there are four kinds of virtue, and as there are four of them, each of them must be one.

**Cle.** Certainly.

**Ath.** And further, all four of them we call one; for we say that courage is virtue, and that prudence is virtue, and the same of the two others, as if they were in reality not many but one, that is, virtue.

**Cle.** Quite so.

**Ath.** There is no difficulty in seeing in what way the two differ from one another, and have

received two names, and so of the rest. But there is more difficulty in explaining why we call these two and the rest of them by the single name of virtue.

**Cle.** How do you mean?

**Ath.** I have no difficulty in explaining what I mean. Let us distribute the subject questions and answers.

**Cle.** Once more, what do you mean?

**Ath.** Ask me what is that one thing which call virtue, and then again speak of as two, one part being courage and the other wisdom. I will tell you how that occurs:-One of them has to do with fear; in this the beasts also participate, and quite young children-I mean courage; for a courageous temper is a gift of nature and not of reason. But without reason there never has been, or is, or will be a wise and understanding soul; it is of a different nature.

**Cle.** That is true.

**Ath.** I have now told you in what way the two are different, and do you in return tell me in what way they are one and the same. Suppose that I ask you in what way the four are one, and when you have answered me, you will have a right to ask of me in return in what way they are four; and then let us proceed to enquire whether in the case of things which have a name and also a definition to them, true knowledge consists in knowing the name only and not the definition. Can he who is good for anything be ignorant of all this without discredit where great and glorious truths are concerned?

**Cle.** I suppose not.

**Ath.** And is there anything greater to the legislator and the guardian of the law, and to him who thinks that he excels all other men in virtue, and has won the palm of excellence, that these very qualities of which we are now speaking-courage, temperance, wisdom, justice?

**Cle.** How can there be anything greater?

**Ath.** And ought not the interpreters, the teachers the lawgivers, the guardians of the other citizens, to excel the rest of mankind, and perfectly to show him who desires to learn and know or whose evil actions require to be punished and reproved, what is the nature of virtue and vice? Or shall some poet who has found his way into the city, or some chance person who pretends to be an instructor of youth, show himself to be better than him who has won the prize for every virtue? And can we wonder that when the guardians are not adequate in speech or action, and have no adequate knowledge of virtue, the city being unguarded should experience the common fate of cities in our day?

**Cle.** Wonder! no.

**Ath.** Well, then, must we do as we said? Or can we give our guardians a more precise knowledge of virtue in speech and action than the many have? or is there any way in which our city can be made to resemble the head and senses of rational beings because possessing such a guardian power?

**Cle.** What, Stranger, is the drift of your comparison?

**Ath.** Do we not see that the city is the trunk, and are not the younger guardians, who are chosen for their natural gifts, placed in the head of the state, having their souls all full of eyes, with which they look about the whole city? They keep watch and hand over their perceptions to the memory, and inform the elders of all that happens in the city; and those whom we compared to the mind, because they have many wise thoughts-that is to say, the old men-take counsel and making use of the younger men as their ministers, and advising with them-in this way both

together truly preserve the whole state:-Shall this or some other be the order of our state? Are all our citizens to be equal in acquirements, or shall there be special persons among them who have received a more careful training and education?

**Cle.** That they should be equal, my; good, sir, is impossible.

**Ath.** Then we ought to proceed to some more exact training than any which has preceded.

**Cle.** Certainly.

**Ath.** And must not that of which we are in need be the one to which we were just now alluding?

**Cle.** Very true.

**Ath.** Did we not say that the workman or guardian, if he be perfect in every respect, ought not only to be able to see the many aims, but he should press onward to the one? this he should know, and knowing, order all things with a view to it.

**Cle.** True.

**Ath.** And can any one have a more exact way of considering or contemplating. anything, than the being able to look at one idea gathered from many different things?

**Cle.** Perhaps not.

**Ath.** Not "Perhaps not," but "Certainly not," my good sir, is the right answer. There never has been a truer method than this discovered by any man.

**Cle.** I bow to your authority, Stranger; let us proceed in the way which you propose.

**Ath.** Then, as would appear, we must compel the guardians of our divine state to perceive, in the first place, what that principle is which is the same in all the four-the same, as we affirm, in courage and in temperance, and in justice and in prudence, and which, being one, we call as we ought, by the single name of virtue. To this, my friends, we will, if you please, hold fast, and not let go until we have sufficiently explained what that is to which we are to look, whether to be regarded as one, or as a whole, or as both, or in whatever way. Are we likely ever to be in a virtuous condition, if we cannot tell whether virtue is many, or four, or one? Certainly, if we take counsel among ourselves, we shall in some way contrive that this principle has a place amongst us; but if you have made up your mind that we should let the matter alone, we will.

**Cle.** We must not, Stranger, by the God of strangers I swear that we must not, for in our opinion you speak most truly; but we should like to know how you will accomplish your purpose.

**Ath.** Wait a little before you ask; and let us, first of all, be quite agreed with one another that the purpose has to be accomplished.

**Cle.** Certainly, it ought to be, if it can be.

**Ast.** Well, and about the good and the honourable, are we to take the same view? Are our guardians only to know that each of them is many, or, also how and in what way they are one?

**Cle.** They must consider also in what sense they are one.

**Ath.** And are they to consider only, and to be unable to set forth what they think?

**Cle.** Certainly not; that would be the state of a slave.

**Ath.** And may not the same be said of all good things-that the true guardians of the laws ought to know the truth about them, and to be able to interpret them in words, and carry them out in



action, judging of what is and what is not well, according to nature?

**Cle.** Certainly.

**Ath.** Is not the knowledge of the Gods which we have set forth with so much zeal one of the noblest sorts of knowledge;-to know that they are, and know how great is their power, as far as in man lies? do indeed excuse the mass of the citizens, who only follow the voice of the laws, but we refuse to admit as guardians any who do not labour to obtain every possible evidence that there is respecting the Gods; our city is forbidden and not allowed to choose as a guardian of the law, or to place in the select order of virtue, him who is not an inspired man, and has not laboured at these things.

**Cle.** It is certainly just, as you say, that he who is indolent about such matters or incapable should be rejected, and that things honourable should be put away from him.

**Ath.** Are we assured that there are two things which lead men to believe in the Gods, as we have already stated?

**Cle.** What are they?

**Ath.** One is the argument about the soul, which has been already mentioned-that it is the eldest, and most divine of all things, to which motion attaining generation gives perpetual existence; the other was an argument from the order of the motion of the stars, and of all things under the dominion of the mind which ordered the universe. If a man look upon the world not lightly or ignorantly, there was never any one so godless who did not experience an effect opposite to that which the many imagine. For they think that those who handle these matters by the help of astronomy, and the accompanying arts of demonstration, may become godless, because they see, as far as they can see, things happening by necessity, and not by an intelligent will accomplishing good.

**Cle.** But what is the fact?

**Ath.** Just the opposite, as I said, of the opinion which once prevailed among men, that the sun and stars are without soul. Even in those days men wondered about them, and that which is now ascertained was then conjectured by some who had a more exact knowledge of them-that if they had been things without soul, and had no mind, they could never have moved with numerical exactness so wonderful; and even at that time some ventured to hazard the conjecture that mind was the orderer of the universe. But these same persons again mistaking the nature of the soul, which they conceived to be younger and not older than the body, once more overturned the world, or rather, I should say, themselves; for the bodies which they saw moving in heaven all appeared to be full of stones, and earth, and many other lifeless substances, and to these they assigned the causes of all things. Such studies gave rise to much atheism and perplexity, and the poets took occasion to be abusive-comparing the philosophers to she-dogs uttering vain howlings, and talking other nonsense of the same sort. But now, as I said, the case is reversed.

**Cle.** How so?

**Ath.** No man can be a true worshipper of the Gods who does not know these two principles-that the soul is the eldest of all things which are born, and is immortal and rules over all bodies; moreover, as I have now said several times, he who has not contemplated the mind of nature which is said to exist in the stars, and gone through the previous training, and seen the connection of music with these things, and harmonized them all with laws and institutions, is not able to give a reason of such things as have a reason. And he who is unable to acquire this in addition to the ordinary virtues of a citizen, can hardly be a good ruler of a whole state; but he should be the subordinate of other rulers. Wherefore, Cleinias and Megillus, let us consider

whether we may not add to all the other laws which we have discussed this further one—that the nocturnal assembly of the magistrates, which has also shared in the whole scheme of education proposed by us, shall be a guard set according to law for the salvation of the state. Shall we propose this?

**Cle.** Certainly, my good friend, we will if the thing is in any degree possible.

**Ath.** Let us make a common effort to gain such an object; for I too will gladly share in the attempt. Of these matters I have had much experience, and have often considered them, and I dare say that I shall be able to find others who will also help.

**Cle.** I agree, Stranger, that we should proceed along the road in which God is guiding us; and how we can proceed rightly has now to be investigated and explained.

**Ath.** O Megillus and Cleinias, about these matters we cannot legislate further until the council is constituted; when that is done, then we will determine what authority they shall have of their own; but the explanation of how this is all to be ordered would only be given rightly in a long discourse.

**Cle.** What do you mean, and what new thing is this?

**Ath.** In the first place, a list would have to be made out of those who by their ages and studies and dispositions and habits are well fitted for the duty of a guardian. In the next place, it will not be easy for them to discover themselves what they ought to learn, or become the disciple of one who has already made the discovery. Furthermore, to write down the times at which, and during which, they ought to receive the several kinds of instruction, would be a vain thing; for the learners themselves do not know what is learned to advantage until the knowledge which is the result of learning has found a place in the soul of each. And so these details, although they could not be truly said to be secret, might be said to be incapable of being stated beforehand, because when stated they would have no meaning.

**Cle.** What then are we to do, Stranger, under these circumstances?

**Ath.** As the proverb says, the answer is no secret, but open to all of us:—We must risk the whole on the chance of throwing, as they say, thrice six or thrice ace, and I am willing to share with you the danger by stating and explaining to you my views about education and nurture, which is the question coming to the surface again. The danger is not a slight or ordinary one, and I would advise you, Cleinias, in particular, to see to the matter; for if you order rightly the city of the Magnetes, or whatever name God may give it, you will obtain the greatest glory; or at any rate you will be thought the most courageous of men in the estimation of posterity. Dear companions, if this our divine assembly can only be established, to them we will hand over the city; none of the present company of legislators, as I may call them, would hesitate about that. And the state will be perfected and become a waking reality, which a little while ago we attempted to create as a dream and in idea only, mingling together reason and mind in one image, in the hope that our citizens might be duly mingled and rightly educated; and being educated, and dwelling in the citadel of the land, might become perfect guardians, such as we have never seen in all our previous life, by reason of the saving virtue which is in them.

**Meg.** Dear Cleinias, after all that has been said, either we must detain the Stranger, and by supplications and in all manner of ways make him share in the foundation of the city, or we must give up the undertaking.

**Cle.** Very true, Megillus; and you must join with me in detaining him.

**Meg.** I will.

**THE END**



Table of Contents



Home



Browse and  
Comment



Search



Buy Books and  
CD-ROMs



Help

© 1994-2009